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Chapter 1

"We've almost ran out of watermint."

Jayfeather twitched his ear in response, dropping the wet moss from his jaws. With the water scent out of the way, he could tell that the herb store was practically empty, apart from a few dry leaves.

Leaf-bare had been rough. With the cold winds and damp dens, whitecough spread fast until most of the warriors and queens had to stay in their own dens – the medicine den was too full. Jayfeather and Leafpool has been working constantly to heal all of the sick cats before the illness got any worse.

Thank StarClan there was no *greencough this year*.

Jayfeather pushed the moss to the side with his paw before padding over to the herb remains. Behind him, he heard Briarlight pause from her exercises, the moss ball dropping beside her.

"Why have you stopped?!" Jayfeather snapped, lashing his tail in annoyance.

"I just wanted to have a look..." Briarlight meowed, shuffling in her bedding. She gasped slightly when she saw the pitiful pile on the ground. "Is there anything I can do to help?" Jayfeather was about to answer, but Leafpool got there first.

"You can keep yourself healthy," The she-cat meowed, brushing past Jayfeather, "so we don't have to worry about you too."

Jayfeather let out a small snort and pushed some of the herbs with his paw. Their scent was stale, and they felt dry beneath their paws.

"There's no use in keeping any of these." He pushed the herbs to the side, over to Leafpool. "They are dry, and they have no more juice in them."

"I'm sure some could be saved – just in case." Leafpool padded over to his side, brushing his flank with her tail. Jayfeather snorted again and sniffed between the cave crevasses for any loose leaves. There were none.

"You're right...these herbs are useless." Leafpool muttered from behind him. Briarlight paused again, causing Jayfeather to lash his tail.

"Briarlight, if you stop again I swear I will-"

"Are you busy?" Cinderheart's amused mew drifted into the medicine den and a few heartbeats later Jayfeather heard her pad into the den with Lionblaze close behind her. From the uneven, clumsy steps he could tell that his brother was limping slightly, and a weak scent of blood made his whiskers twitch.

"I guess not, seeing as any cat can walk in here nowadays." Jayfeather snapped, twitching his tail in annoyance. He pushed a few dried leaves aside before walking over to his brother. "What have you done this time?" He asked, dipping his head to sniff his paw.

"It's nothing, really..." Lionblaze shuffled embarrassedly. "I just –"

"He stepped on a thorn on his way back from the hunting patrol." Cinderheart interrupted, purring fondly at her mate. Jayfeather flicked his ear and straightened himself. Beckoning Lionblaze over with his tail, he moved further away from the medicine den's entrance.

"Hi, Cinderheart!" Briarlight's excited mew sounded behind him.

"You okay?" Cinderheart replied, a faint purr of fondness escaping from her throat. Jayfeather ignored Briarlight's reply, instead rummaging through the remaining herb store for some marigold. Sniffing deep in the corners, he found some petals crushed in the corners. It would have to do.

I need to go to get more herbs, Jayfeather thought in alarm, *how will we survive the rest of leaf-bare like this?*

Both Jayfeather and Leafpool tried to collect more herbs over the past moon, but sickness began to spread fast until they were both worked off their paws. Each moonhigh Jayfeather would crawl wearily to his nest, letting his eyes snap close, only to get woken up by a intruding paw, begging to go to the nursery or the warriors den. The whitecough had especially tough on the newborn litters, only a few days old. Luckily, no kits had gone to Starclan.

There – underneath some tansy there was the last of the fresh marigold. Jayfeather grabbed it gently in his jaws and turned to face Lionblaze once more.

"Hold out your paw." Jayfeather ordered through a mouthful of petals. He heard Lionblaze shift slowly.

"It's pretty deep..." Lionblaze said worriedly. "Do you think I'll be alright?" Jayfeather couldn't help but let out a amused purr. His brother really acted like a kit sometimes.

"I think you'll pull through." Jayfeather mumbled, twitching his whiskers in amusement. He dropped the petals beside him and sniffed the wound carefully.

"Lick it slowly." He ordered. Lionblaze's tail twitched beside his and he began to do as he instructed, wincing every now and then.

"How is he?" Cinderheart meowed from behind him suddenly, sitting beside him.

"Oh he'll live." Jayfeather snapped, standing up on his paws. "I don't think a thorn in a paw is a big worry right now."

"Be nice, Jayfeather." Leafpool scolded, amusement sounding in her mew. "Cinderheart was just asking." Jayfeather snorted and turned back to Lionblaze.

"Is it soft yet?" He asked, ignoring his mother.

"I think so."

"You think?" Jayfeather sniffed the paw again. It was now soft around the edges of the thorn, and fresh blood was scented slightly.

"Hold still." Grasping the thorn in his teeth, the medicine cat began to pull gently. The thorn shifted and slipped out of his brother's paw easily.

"That hurt." Lionblaze pouted. Jayfeather rolled his blind eyes and spat the thorn out onto the stone floor. He then picked up the marigold petals and began to chew.

"You'll live." He mumbled, sniffing the paw again. "Stop twitching." Lionblaze obeyed and Jayfeather heard him shift nervously.

Of course, he realised, *this is his first thorn in his paw.*

Lionblaze has grown up with not being hurt – it was the power StarClan had given him as part of the three. This meant no scratches, no bruises, no bites and no thorns in paws. Unlike all cats, his brother had never had to go to the medicine den to do this sort of thing. The experience was entirely new to him.

Jayfeather said nothing to voice these thoughts, however, and began to lick the marigold petals on the would gently, making sure that there was no chance of infection. That was the last thing ThunderClan needed.

"No more patrols until at least next sunhigh." Jayfeather ordered, sweeping the thorn into some old bedding that needed to be gotten rid of.

"What?!" Lionblaze stood up quickly, nearly toppling Jayfeather from his crouch.

"Watch it, mousebrain!" He hissed, lashing his tail. Lionblaze ignored his comment, pacing in annoyance. "You heard me!" The medicine cat growled warningly at his brother.

"Obey Jayfeather, Lionblaze." Leafpool ordered. "He's a medicine cat. He knows what he is doing – and so do I. And I agree with Jayfeather." Leafpool yawned beside him and moved towards the mouth of the den. Lionblaze grumbled beside Jayfeather as his mother spoke.

"I'm going to go and collect some herbs whilst the snow isn't too

bad." She meowed, giving her shoulder a quick lick. Her whiskers twitched. "Do you think you can manage Lionblaze on your own?" A purr sounded from her throat.

"Just go and collect herbs. I'm fine." Jayfeather replied, rolling his eyes again. He heard Leafpool draw in her breath, about to reply, but a sudden hurry of pawsteps cut her off.

"Jayfeather! Leafpool!" Daisy's urgent mew rang through the den, and Jayfeather's stomach dropped as he scented the fear on her pelt.

"What is it?!" Leafpool asked, her tail twitching nervously. Next to him, Lionblaze tensed in worry.

"Sparkkit's sick!" Daisy yowled.

"How long ago was this?!" Jayfeather questioned, forcing himself to stay calm. He buried his nose into the dry herb pile whilst listening to Daisy's reply.

"Not long ago." The queen calmed herself. "I'm not too sure when she got sick, but she began coughing badly and...Squirrelflight's scared." Jayfeather pulled out a small leaf of catmint that had a slightly stronger scent than the others. It would have to do.

Please, StarClan – we don't need another loss in ThunderClan!

"Leafpool – you check on Sparkkit." Jayfeather didn't let the panic sound in his mew, and thrust the small leaf close the the medicine cat's mouth.

"Okay." Leafpool replied, her mew hard and determined. "Take her to me, Daisy. And try to calm Squirrelflight, I'm sure it's nothing to..." her mew faded from Jayfeather's ears as he swept the remaining marigold petals away with his tail.

"Will Sparkkit be okay?" Briarlight's worries mew sounded behind him, her moss ball dropping beside her.

"We'll see." Jayfeather replied, moving to the entrance.

"I'm sure it's nothing." Cinderheart reassured, brushing past him and towards Lionblaze. Jayfeather resisted snapping back at Cinderheart – she isn't a medicine cat, she doesn't understand – and quickly mewed over his shoulder:

"Don't let Lionblaze out of your sight!"

"I won't." The she-cat mewed affectionately.

"Where are you going?!" Lionblaze asked, standing up carefully. Jayfeather snorted.

"Herb collecting, mousebrain!" He walked out of the den with a lash of his tail.

—

Jayfeather moved out of the woods and onto the moorland belonging to WindClan. In his jaws were a few small leaves of catmint and a little watermint. None of it was enough, however, and he vowed that he would keep searching until his mouth was bursting with herbs.

He had scented some catmint – the thing that was needed most – in the winds that tugged his fur and, inhaling deeply again, Jayfeather noted the scent was stronger and fresher.

"Herb collecting only, I hope?"

Jayfeather jumped slightly, cursing himself for not noticing the strong smell of WindClan warriors that were now standing in front of him. The mew that addressed him he recognised immediately – it belonged to Crowfeather. With him were Gorsetail, Heathertail and another warrior that he couldn't name. It was probably an apprentice, actually.

"What else do you think?!" Jayfeather snapped, neck-fur prickling.

"Keep your fur on." Gorsetail meowed, stepping aside. "Come on, Crowfeather, let him pass. He's a medicine cat." With a huff he

heard the grey tom step hesitantly next to Gorsetail, his tail twitching.

"Don't steal any prey!" The eager apprentice meowed as Jayfeather stalked past, fur raised in excitement.

"Quiet." Gorsetail shushed. The medicine cat breathed in deeply again, pleased to find that the catmint seemed to be fresh and full grown. Running the rest of the way, Jayfeather couldn't help but purr in relief. This would cure Sparkkit, and any others.

He dipped his head down and, dropping the other herbs, began to pick as many leaves as he could off the stem, careful not to split or crack them. He was concentrating so hard that he didn't hear the raised yowls from the top of the hill. Suddenly, a cat shot past him carelessly, making him stumble.

"Watch it, mousebrain!" Jayfeather hissed. He lashed his tail, picking up the herbs.

"Dog! Dog!" Crowfeather's yowl sounded from behind him and Jayfeather could smell the fear coming off him in waves. The medicine cat tensed, ears erect.

"Run!" Gorsetail's yowl pulled him from his trance and she shot past him swiftly. Jayfeather's neck fur raised and a flurry of barks descended on the moorland.

"Jayfeather! This way!" Gorsetail had came back, breathless and fearful, but determined. Jayfeather nodded and began to run, following the warrior's scent. The dog seemed to not be chasing them, and Jayfeather allowed himself to stop panicking. He parted his jaws as Gorsetail's pawsteps halted beside his, and scented the air. Then he realised.

"The catmint!" Jayfeather yowled, digging his claws into the ground. He must've left it beside the plant in panic.

"It's fine, Jayfeather. You can collect more when the dog is gone." Gorsetail suggested, but he was barely listening. He needed that catmint now. Later was not soon enough, and cats were sick in

ThunderClan. Not only was the catmint gone, but so were the other herbs he had collected. He needed to get them.

Opening his jaws again, the scent told Jayfeather that the dog was still quite far away. He could still smell the herbs that he had left in the wind.

StarClan help me, Jayfeather prayed before forcing his legs to move. He ignored Gorsetail's confused yowl as he began to sprint back to the danger.

"Jayfeather! Stop!" Gorsetail had caught up with him and now was running beside him. He didn't answer the warrior and ran faster, feeling the air whistle in his ears.

"I need those herbs!" Jayfeather hissed breathlessly to the she-cat beside him, inhaling deeply again. The dog scent was overwhelming now, but so was the catmint's.

Jayfeather halted suddenly. He heard Gorsetail rush past him.

"I'll distract the dog!" She meowed before joining her patrol; the dog began barking again, and the medicine cat was shocked at how close it sounded. Knowing he had a few heartbeats before the dog saw him, he grabbed the leaves in his jaws.

The barking was suddenly too close and, before Jayfeather could react, he felt hot breath on his pelt and a sudden, strong pain in his leg. The medicine cat shrieked, trying to pull the limb out of the dog's jaws, but the dog just growled.

Yowls of battle surrounded him as he fought to let go, and Crowfeather, Gorsetail and Heathertail were suddenly beside him, hissing at the dog. With a screech, Heathertail leapt past Jayfeather and the medicine cat felt the dog's jaws slacken. Seeing his chance, he quickly pulled his leg free and began running across the moor. He was in pain and disoriented – he couldn't remember which direction would take him back to his Clan, or anywhere safe. Still, desperately, Jayfeather headed further up the fields and met a hill. He could still hear the dog's barking ringing in his ears and the yowls of warning from the cats that gave the dog the chase. He kept

running, but he was slowing down as he reached the steepest part of hill...

And the dog's breath was suddenly hot against his legs, and it's rasping bark was too close. Jayfeather yowled in fear and panic forced his aching limbs to move faster. The medicine cat felt the hill slope down unexpectedly and he slipped, falling though the air.

Jayfeather landed painfully, smacking his head against the hard, frosted ground. Stunned, he lay in the grass for a few heartbeats, gasping. He closed his unseeing eyes as he heard felt the steady tremble of the dog's paws move closer to him. The WindClan warriors sounded far away, and his stomach dropped as realisation dawned: they would not reach him in time.

A strange yowl tore through the air as Jayfeather could hear the dog panting against his ears; it changed to a small whines and claws dug into the earth as it was pulled away. The medicine cat slumped in relief. The dog was gone.

The yowl sounded again and Jayfeather raised his head as huge, heavy footsteps clumped towards him – the hurried movement made his head throb, however, and he let it fall quickly. A strong small flooded his senses and it took a moment to realise what it was.

Twolegs.

Jayfeather yowled in panic and tried to run but the twolegs were quicker – one of their huge paws grabbed him and lifted him off the ground and into the air.

Jayfeather squirmed in their grip but he was too dizzy, and he could feel warm blood running down his leg. He hissed, scratched and bit but the twoleg's pelts weren't damaged enough to let go. They just held him harder.

StarClan help me!

Chapter 2

Lionblaze breathed heavily though his nose and flopped onto his nest, watching as the leaves fluttered around him. Grunting, he raised a hind leg to itch his side, twitching his tail angrily.

"Look whose just lost their mouse!" Cinderheart's amused mew – far too amused in his opinion – sounded from the opening of the warriors den, soon followed by herself. Lionblaze snorted, pausing from his scratching.

"You would be too!" He whined, twisting his paw so it was in her view. "Look at it!" He moaned. Cinderheart purred.

"Doesn't look too bad to me..." She ran her tail across his back and lay next to him, pressing her side against his.

"It stinks." Lionblaze muttered. Cinderheart purred louder, rubbing her cheek against his.

"I think you'll survive." She meowed, licking his ear. "But for now you have to rest."

"But I'm fine!" He yowled, startling Cloudtail out of his doze. "Oops...sorry..." he apologised to the senior warrior.

"No harm done." Cloudtail replied, yawning. He rose to his feet. "Actually, I should go hunting." The white tom caught sight of Lionblaze's foot, and his eyes shone with amusement. "I see you have been imprisoned here by Jayfeather and Leafpool." He purred.

"Just Jayfeather." Lionblaze muttered moodily. "And I have to stay here..."

Cloudtail shook his fur, sending a scatter of leaves to the ground.

"Don't try and sneak out, that's my advice." The white warrior meowed, eyes shining again. "I remember I tried to do the same."

"What happened?" Cinderheart asked eagerly, swishing her tail in excitement.

"Your brother caught me." He meowed, nodding at Lionblaze. "He may be blind, but he is scary. He pinned me to the ground before I even left camp, and snarled at me so bad I was afraid to go out of this den for ages..." he shivered. "I could feel his glare from the other side of the camp." Cloudtail yawned again, stretching his back legs. "Anyway, hope you recover soon!" He meowed, strolling out of the den, waving his tail.

"See – no sneaking out for you." Cinderheart meowed, nuzzling him. "You heard what Cloudtail said."

"I'm sure Jayfeather wouldn't do that to me." Lionblaze persisted, rising to his feet. Cinderheart quickly swatted his ear, rising on her back paws and slamming on top of him. Both cats sunk back to the ground, leaves and feathers scattering around them.

"Would he really?" Cinderheart asked, purring softly. Lionblaze paused.

No, no I don't think he would...

"Look – I'll bring you some prey later." Cinderheart comforted, pressing against his side again.

"I'm not dying!" Lionblaze argued hotly, twitching his ear. Cinderheart purred again, whiskers shaking in amusement.

"And when Jayfeather returns, I'll ask him to check up on you. Just to see whether you can go on an evening hunting patrol." Lionblaze perked up at her words.

"Would you really?!" He asked. "Thanks, Cinderheart." He nuzzled against her cheek. "I love you.

"Love you too." She returned his touch, digging her face into his thick fur. She rose to her feet shortly afterwards, licking his ear fondly. "I'll be back soon to keep you company."

"Where are you going?" Lionblaze asked.

"I promised Squirrelflight that I would do a border patrol at sunhigh." Automatically, Lionblaze looked up and saw long beams of sunlight snaking through the den entrance.

"Claw any Shadowclan cats for me!" He called as his mate was exiting again. Stopping for a second, Cinderheart turned her head.

"I will, don't worry." She answered, flicking her tail. Absentmindedly, Lionblaze flicked his tail back before realising that she couldn't see him. Feeling miserable, the golden tom lay his head on his paw, watching a feather drift across the floor. A new burst of sunlight washed over his back and he purred.

Maybe it's not so bad, relaxing for a while.

He watched as other warriors walked past him, chatting amongst themselves. From where he lay, he could see the medicine den.

Leafpool still hadn't emerged.

His amber eyes flicked to the clan entrance. Jayfeather still hadn't came back with the herbs that he had promised, which was unusual. It had been a while, longer than what it would usually take. Lionblaze's mind couldn't help but picture a bad situation that his brother could've been caught up in; ever since he was a kit he had been worried about Jayfeather's safety, though a lot of the time Jayfeather himself would tell him otherwise (by telling he meant pinning him to the ground in a snarling fit of rage). Still, the fear wouldn't let go of him, so he rose to his feet unsteadily, padding across the clearing. His paw, he realised, was already feeling better. He had to thank Jayfeather for that later.

"Ivypool?" Lionblaze meowed. Ivypool looked up from her mouse, licking her lips.

"What is it Lionblaze?" She asked him. Fernsong perked his ears up next to her, moving to a sitting position.

"Have you seen Jayfeather anywhere?" Lionblaze watched as Ivypool glanced towards the entrance, swishing her tail. She was silent for a few seconds, deep in thought.

"I only saw him go out to get herbs." Ivypool informed him. She let out a small purr of amusement. "I offered to go with him but he just growled at me."

"That's my brother alright." Lionblaze sighed. The uneasiness amplified in his chest and he mentally scolded himself for getting worked up over nothing. At least, he thought it was nothing until Ivypool's eyes narrowed with concern.

"It's been a long time, hasn't it?" She stated, her tail twitching uneasily. Worry shone in her eyes for the cat she had grown to like.

"That's why I was asking." Lionblaze replied glumly, shifting his paws. "I thought you would've seen him, seeing as you have a perfect view of the entrance."

"Maybe we missed him come in." Fernsong suggesting, giving his chest a quick lick. "After all, we were eating and you were in the warriors den – we could be mistaken." Fernsong nodded towards the medicine den. "We should see whether he is in there."

"You're right." Ivypool stood up, stretching. "We should go and check."

Lionblaze agreed, but when they got to the medicine den Jayfeather was nowhere in sight, his scent fading.

"Is everything alright?" Leafpool entered the den, a few herbs in her jaws. Lionblaze dug his claws in the earth, pelt pricking with fear.

"Have you seen Jay –" Lionblaze began but was interrupted by a loud yowl from the clearing. WindClan scent washed on his nose and he tensed. The yowl was full of fear, and quickened his heart.

"What is going on?" Ivypool asked no one in particular. Together they left the medicine den warily.

Crowfeather and Gorsetail were standing in the centre of the clearing, just in front of the highstones. Bramblestar was sitting on them, his eyes wide with surprise and fear.

"What are they doing here?" Graystripe murmured softly next to

them. "I've never seen a WindClan cat look so exhausted."

Lionblaze studied the cats, noticing that their chests were moving quickly, their breaths harsh and panting. Gorsetail's legs were trembling.

"There was a dog on the hills." Crowfeather didn't wait for Bramblestar's permission to speak, his eyes round. Lionblaze has never seen Crowfeather look so spooked. "It attacked Jayfeather!"

Lionblaze's heart dropped, and he distantly heard himself cry out "what!". The clan echoed him, and he saw Leafpool freeze, dropping her herbs.

"He'll be fine." Graystripe said next to him soothingly. The elder ran his tail across his spine in an attempt to comfort him.

"Where is he? How bad is he hurt?!" Leafpool shouted out, stepping forward. "Show me the way and I'll heal him."

Lionblaze watched in horror as Gorsetail shook her head sadly.

"We lost sight of him when he ran over the hill." She explained. But then there was a Twoleg and..."

The clan was silent now, hanging onto Gorsetail's every word.

"And?" Bramblestar asked quietly.

"The Twoleg took him away."

"My brother?!" Lionblaze yowled out. Being captured by a Twoleg was almost unheard of, and it shocked him to the core. The Twoleg territory was huge, far too big to be searched quickly. "Jay..."

Graystripe pressed against him, but it was a small comfort. He had already lost Hollyleaf – was he going to loose Jayfeather too?

"We will send out patrols to the area where he was last seen." Bramblestar ordered, gathering himself. He nodded to the WindClan warriors. "Thank you for telling us as soon as you could."

"We sent back my apprentice to get WindClan's help." Crowfeather told their leader. "No cat should be left with Twolegs." He snarled.

"I want to go." Lionblaze meowed loudly. Leafpool shook her head, sniffing his paw.

"That paw can still get infected."

"But –"

"No, Lionblaze." It was Squirrelflight who meowed this, stepping in front of him. Behind her, two organised patrols were waiting for her order. "We are already down a medicine cat, and we can't afford something simple to become dangerous."

"He's my brother." Lionblaze replied stubbornly.

"And we will find him." Squirrelflight nodded to Ivypool. "Could you join Thornclaw's patrol?"

Ivypool nodded, running towards the group of cats as they left the clearing, following the WindClan warriors. Lionblaze watched them go, his claws itching to run after them.

"Everyone else stay calm." Bramblestar told the remaining cats. "We will find Jayfeather, and he is a tough cat. He will be fine."

"But he is blind!" Lionblaze called out, his tail lashing. "And he can't fight! How is he going to be fine?!"

Bramblestar leapt from the rock, moving to stand beside him.

"I'm just as worried as you are Lionblaze." He meowed softly. "But right now we can't loose hope. Jayfeather is a strong cat – I meant what I said." Bramblestar gave a small purr. "He even scares me sometimes."

"I know he's strong." Lionblaze sat down, letting his posture slip. "But others have got the upper hand."

"I know." His leader rubbed himself against Lionblaze. "But all we can do right now is stay positive."

Lionblaze watched his leader walk away, then shifted his gaze to the entrance. Cats returning from patrol were being filled in by Brightheart, all of them wearing identical faces of shock.

~

It was growing late but nothing had changed. Lionblaze watched as patrol after patrol of cats came back empty-pawed, Jayfeather nowhere in sight. It was moonhigh when Bramblestar, with a heavy heart, told them to stop looking for the day, and to start again the next.

"You should be able to join in tomorrow." Cinderheart told him, licking his ear. She snuggled deeper in her nest, leaves crunching beneath her.

"I know. But I need to go now." Lionblaze tried to get up but was stopped by his mate, who hooked her tail around him.

"You will be better when you have rested." She told him. Lionblaze knew what she was saying was true, and he reluctantly relaxed beside her. He relished the warmth coming from her body, her soft scent filling his senses; he pressed closer to her, laying down his head.

"He must be terrified." Lionblaze murmured. Cinderheart sleepily licked him again, closing her eyes.

"He won't be. He knows that you are going to find him."

Lionblaze waited until Cinderheart's breaths slowed before standing up, silently stepping over warriors and exiting the den. Guilt churned in his belly as he looked back at his sleeping mate. He reminded himself that she couldn't come – she would be in too much danger and the clan needed her. He never stopped to think that the clan needed him, and he was in danger too.

He scented the air, breathing in the fresh, night air. He slipped through the hole by the dirtplace that he had used when he was younger.

Lionblaze wasn't seen as he ran through the woods, a golden streak

against the night. He didn't look back again, only staring in front of him determinedly, his heart hammering in his chest.

I'm coming Jayfeather.